A SERMON ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY,

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a single word, for the sake of brevity and convenience. The doctrine, then, as delivered in holy Scripture, though not exactly in the same words, is very short, and amounts only to this: that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are each of them God, and yet there is but one God. For as to the word Person, when we say there are three persons; and as to those other explanations in the Athanasian creed this day read to you (whether compiled by Athanasius or not) they were taken up three hundred years after Christ to expound this doctrine; and I will tell you upon what occasion. About that time there sprung up a heresy of people called Arians, from one Arius the leader of them. These denied our Saviour to be God, although they allowed all the rest of the Gospel, wherein they were more severe than their followers among us. Thus the Christian world was divided into two parts, till at length, by the zeal and courage of St. Athanasius, the Arians were condemned in a general council, and a creed formed upon the true faith, as St. Athanasius hath settled it. This creed is now read at certain times in our churches, which although it is useful for edification to those who understand it, yet since it contains some nice and philosophical points which few people can comprehend, the bulk of mankind is obliged to believe no more than the scripture doctrine, as I have delivered it; because that creed was intended only as an answer to the Arians in their own way, who were very subtle disputers.

But this heresy having revived in the world about a hundred years ago, and continued ever since; not out of a zeal to truth, but to give a loose to wickedness by throwing off all religion; several divines, in order to answer the cavils of those adversaries to truth and morality, began to find out farther explanations of this doctrine of the Trinity by rules of philosophy; which have multiplied controversies to such a degree, as to beget scruples that have perplexed the minds of many sober Christians, who otherwise, could never have entertained them.

I must therefore be bold to affirm, that the method taken by many of those learned men to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, hath been founded upon a mistake.

It must be allowed, that every man is bound to follow the

rules and directions of that measure of reason which God hath given him; and indeed he cannot do otherwise, if he will be sincere, or act like a man. For instance: if I should be commanded by an angel from Heaven to believe it is midnight at noon-day; yet I could not believe him. So if I were directly told in Scripture that three are one, and one is three, I could not conceive or believe it in the natural common sense of that expression, but must suppose that something dark and mystical was meant, which it pleased God to conceal from me and from all the world. Thus in the text, "There are three that bear record," &c. Am I capable of knowing and defining, what union and what distinction there may be in the divine nature, which possibly may be hid from the angels themselves? Again, I see it plainly declared in Scripture, that there is but one God; and yet I find our Saviour claiming the prerogative of God in knowing men's thoughts; in saying, "He and his Father are one;" and "before Abraham was, I am." I read, that the disciples worshipped him: that Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God:" and St. John, chap. i. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I read likewise that the Holy Ghost bestowed the power of working miracles, and the gift of tongues, which, if rightly considered, is as great a miracle as any, that a number of illiterate men should of a sudden be qualified to speak all the languages then known in the world, such as could be done by the inspiration of God alone. From these several texts it is plain, that God commands us to believe there is a union, and there is a distinction; but what that union, or what that distinction is, all mankind are equally ignorant, and must continue so, at least till the day of judgment, without some revelation.

But because I cannot conceive the nature of this union and distinction in the divine nature, am I therefore to reject them as absurd and impossible, as I would if any one told me, that three men are one, and one man is three? We are told, that a man and his wife are one flesh; this I can comprehend the meaning of; yet, literally taken, it is a thing impossible. But the apostle tells us, "We see but in part, and we know but in

part;" and yet we would comprehend all the secret ways and workings of God.

Therefore I shall again repeat the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is positively affirmed in Scripture: that God is there expressed in three different names, as Father, as Son, and as Holy Ghost; that each of these is God, and that there is but one God. But this union and distinction are a mystery utterly unknown to mankind.

This is enough for any good Christian to believe on this great article, without ever inquiring any farther. And this can be contrary to no man's reason, although the knowledge of it is hid from him.

But there is another difficulty of great importance among those who quarrel with the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as with several other articles of Christianity; which is, that our religion abounds in mysteries, and these they are so bold as to revile as cant, imposture, and priestcraft. It is impossible for us to determine, for what reasons God thought fit to communicate some things to us in part, and leave some part a mystery: but so it is in fact, and so the holy Scriptures tell us in several places. For instance: the resurrection and change of our bodies are called mysteries by St. Paul; our Saviour's incarnation is another; the kingdom of God is called a mystery by our Saviour, to be only known to his disciples; so is faith and the word of God by St. Paul: I omit many others. So that to declare against all mysteries without distinction or exception, is to declare against the whole tenor of the New Testament.

There are two conditions, that may bring a mystery under suspicion. First, When it is not taught and commanded in holy writ; or secondly, when the mystery turns to the advantage of those who preach it to others. Now as to the first, it can never be said, that we preach mysteries without warrant from Holy Scripture, although I confess this of the Trinity may have sometimes been explained by human invention, which might perhaps better have been spared. As to the second, it will not be possible to charge the Protestant priesthood with proposing any temporal advantage to themselves by broaching, or multiplying, or preaching of mysteries. Does this mystery

of the Trinity, for instance, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, bring the least profit or power to the preachers? No; it is as great a mystery to themselves as it is to the meanest of their hearers; and may be rather a cause of humiliation, by putting their understanding, in that point, upon a level with the most ignorant of their flock. It is true, indeed, the Roman Church hath very much enriched herself by trading in mysteries, for which they have not the least authority from Scripture, and which were fitted only to advance their own temporal wealth and grandeur; such as transubstantiation, the worshipping of images, indulgences for sins, Purgatory, and masses for the dead; with many more. But it is the perpetual talent of those who have ill-will to our church, or a contempt for all religion, taken up by the wickedness of their lives, to charge us with the errors and corruptions of popery, which all Protestants have thrown off near two hundred years: whereas those mysteries held by us, have no prospect of power, pomp, or wealth, but have been ever maintained by the universal body of true believers from the days of the apostles, and will be so to the resurrection; neither will the gates of Hell prevail against them.

It may be thought perhaps a strange thing, that God should require us to believe mysteries, while the reason or manner of what we are to believe is above our comprehension, and wholly concealed from us: neither doth it appear at first sight, that the believing or not believing them doth concern either the glory of God, or contribute to the goodness or wickedness of our lives. But this is a great and dangerous mistake. We see what a mighty weight is laid upon faith, both in the Old and New Testament. In the former we read, how the faith of Abraham is praised, who could believe that God would raise from him a great nation, at the very time that he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, and despaired of any other issue: and this was to him a great mystery. Our Saviour is perpetually preaching faith to his disciples, or reproaching them with the want of it; and St. Paul produceth numerous examples of the wonders done by faith. And all this is highly reasonable; for, faith is an entire dependence upon the truth, the power, the justice, and the mercy of God; which depend-

ence will certainly incline us to obey him in all things. So that the great excellency of faith consists in the consequence it hath upon our actions: as, if we depend upon the truth and wisdom of a man, we shall certainly be more disposed to follow his advice. Therefore let no man think that he can lead as good a moral life without faith as with it; for this reason, because he who hath no faith, cannot by the strength of his own reason or endeavors, so easily resist temptations, as the other, who depends upon God's assistance in the overcoming of his frailties, and is sure to be rewarded for ever in Heaven for his victory over them. "Faith," says the apostle, "is the evidence of things not seen:" he means, that faith is a virtue, by which anything commanded us by God to believe, appears evident and certain to us, although we do not see, nor can conceive it; because by faith we entirely depend upon the truth and power of God.

It is an old and true distinction, that things may be above our reason, without being contrary to it. Of this kind are the power, the nature, and the universal presence of God, with innumerable other points. How little do those who quarrel with mysteries know of the commonest actions of nature! the growth of an animal, of a plant, or of the smallest seed, is a mystery to the wisest among men. If an ignorant person were told, that a loadstone would draw iron at a distance, he might say it was a thing contrary to his reason, and could not believe before he saw it with his eyes.

The manner whereby the soul and body are united, and how they are distinguished, is wholly unaccountable to us. We see but one part, and yet we know we consist of two; and this is a mystery we cannot comprehend, any more than that of the Trinity.

From what hath been said, it is manifest, that God did never command us to believe, nor his ministers to preach, any doctrine which is contrary to the reason he hath pleased to endow us with; but for his own wise ends has thought fit to conceal from us the nature of the thing he commands; thereby to try our faith and obedience, and increase our dependence upon him.

It is highly probable, that if God should please to reveal unto us this great mystery of the Trinity, or some other mysteries in our holy religion, we should not be able to understand them, unless he would at the same time think fit to bestow on us some new powers or faculties of the mind, which we want at present, and are reserved till the day of resurrection to life eternal. "For now," as the apostle says, "We see through a glass darkly, but then face to face."

Thus, we see, the matter is brought to this issue: we must either believe what God directly commands us in holy Scripture, or we must wholly reject the Scripture, and the Christian religion which we pretend to profess. But this, I hope, is too desperate a step for any of us to make.

I have already observed, that those who preach up the belief of the Trinity, or of any other mystery, cannot propose any temporal advantage to themselves by so doing. But this is not the case of those who oppose these doctrines. Do they lead better moral lives than a good Christian? are they more just in their dealings? more chaste, or temperate, or charitable? Nothing at all of this; but on the contrary, their intent is to overthrow all religion, that they may gratify their vices without any reproach from the world, or their own conscience; and are zealous to bring over as many others as they can to their own opinions; because it is some kind of imaginary comfort to have a multitude on their side.

There is no miracle mentioned in holy writ, which, if it were strictly examined, is not as much contrary to common reason, and as much a mystery, as this doctrine of the Trinity; and therefore we may with equal justice deny the truth of them all. For instance: it is against the laws of nature, that a human body should be able to walk upon the water, as St. Peter is recorded to have done: or that a dead carcass should be raised from the grave after three days, when it began to corrupt; which those who understand anatomy will pronounce to be impossible by the common rules of nature and reason. Yet these miracles, and many others, are positively affirmed in the Gospel; and these we must believe, or give up our holy religion to atheists and infidels.

I shall now make a few inferences and observations upon what has been said.

First. It would be well, if people would not lay so much weight on their own reason in matters of religion, as to think everything impossible and absurd which they cannot conceive. How often do we contradict the right rules of reason in the whole course of our lives? Reason itself is true and just, but the reason of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interests, his passions, and his vices. Let any man but consider, when he hath a controversy with another, though his cause be ever so unjust, though the whole world be against him, how blinded he is by the love of himself, to believe that right is wrong, and wrong is right, when it makes for his own advantage. Where is then the right use of his reason, which he so much boasts of, and which he would blasphemously set up to control the commands of the Almighty?

Secondly. When men are tempted to deny the mysteries of religion, let them examine and search into their own hearts, whether they have not some favorite sin, which is of their party in this dispute, and which is equally contrary to other commands of God in the Gospel. For, why do men love darkness rather than light? The Scripture tells us, "Because their deeds are evil;" and there can be no other reason assigned. Therefore, when men are curious and inquisitive to discover some weak sides in Christianity, and inclined to favor everything that is offered to its disadvantage, it is plain they wish it were not true; and those wishes can proceed from nothing but an evil conscience; because if there be truth in our religion, their condition must be miserable.

And therefore, thirdly, men should consider, that raising difficulties concerning the mysteries in religion, cannot make them more wise, learned, or virtuous; better neighbors, or friends, or more serviceable to their country; but, whatever they pretend, will destroy their inward peace of mind by perpetual doubts and fears arising in their breasts. And God forbid we should ever see the times so bad, when dangerous opinions in religion will be a means to get favor and preferment;